

Becky Pettit and Jennifer L. Hook: Gendered Tradeoffs. Family, Social Policy, and Economic Inequality in Twenty-One Countries

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In *Gendered Tradeoffs*, Becky Pettit and Jennifer L. Hook attempt to unveil the paradoxical effects of seemingly egalitarian social policies in 21 countries. The seven chapters, which follow an introductory section, integrate life course theories with microeconomic and comparative explanations for gender inequality among women, men, and families in the home and the workplace. The authors rely on data spanning the years 1969–2000 from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), which consists of a collection of over hundred household surveys.

After decades of scholars proclaiming the positive effects of social policies, the authors trace the unintended consequences of employment and work–family policies on gender inequality within, and across, countries. These include a decline in work hours and female wages through reduced female labor force participation, the formation of non-egalitarian gender roles and domestic responsibilities, and tradeoffs in long-term economic security. The authors examine gender inequalities in terms of employment and hours worked (Chap. 3, 4, and 7), occupation (Chap. 5), and pay (Chap. 6). They ask if there is a tradeoff between women’s inclusion in the labor market and gender equality within it. The main asset of this book is the integration of cross-national variability in economic outcomes over the life course (e.g., Chap. 3, p. 50, or Chap. 5, p. 99), as well as an analysis of variability in women’s economic standing across twenty-one countries. Each chapter contains a special “spotlight section” using the United States and Germany as examples of different types of policies (e.g., Chap. 3, p. 59, or Chap. 5, p. 114). Chapter 7

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provides an in-depth analysis of the heterogeneity and dynamics of gender inequality within the two single-country settings, the United States and Germany.

The authors review arguments to explain economic inequality from the perspective of human capital and preference theories as well as life course and welfare state literature (Chap. 2) and link these arguments to findings from a cross-national perspective. Using OECD data, they identify variations by gender in college attendance, gender segregation in higher education, and the gender gap in domestic work as major sources of economic inequality between men and women. Integrating those arguments and findings, they offer an “inclusion-equality tradeoff” framework that guides the empirical analysis to explain tensions between women’s labor market inclusion and their equality within that market.

Chapter 3 focuses on employment rates of men and women in order to measure economic inequality. Interestingly, the authors find that national-level conditions moderate the effects of individual characteristics on women’s employment. For example, the provision of public childcare fosters employment primarily among higher educated women (p. 56) and part-time working opportunities contribute to a cleavage between mothers with very young children and other mothers. Chapter 4 focuses on full- and part-time work and concludes that policies that relieve the domestic demands of childrearing not only foster mothers’ employment but also enable them to secure full-time jobs, especially for higher educated mothers. Moreover, the authors find indications of a positive effect of unionization on integrating women into full- and part-time employment. Nevertheless, high rates of women’s labor market involvement do little to remedy the occupational sex segregation (Chap. 5, p. 93) and the persistent gender wage gap (Chap. 6, p. 134) unless gender inequalities in domestic work are not relieved. For instance, Nordic countries, like the Netherlands or Sweden, enable women to combine work and family, but foster mothers’ selection into female-dominated, mostly less-paying jobs, whereas Italy’s married women and mothers in employment are a highly selective and committed group that earns wages nearly commensurate with those of men. In this context, an account of the public sector size would have offered a welcome addition to the interpretation of the results in this analysis (well documented in the methodological Appendix).

Applying these cross-national findings, chapter 7 looks at the dynamics of labor market inclusion in two single-country settings, the United States and Germany (i.e., Germany as a whole after reunification). Despite being restricted to a two-country setting and the limited generalizability of the findings, the chapter pinpoints the class cleavage in inequality in the United States through a focus on race and ethnicity (e.g., among non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, and Hispanic women), and in Germany with a focus on groups by nationality (e.g., Turkish and other foreign nationals). They offer additional details on previous cross-national results, for example, explaining a higher homogeneity in distribution over occupations among minority groups in Germany as compared to the United States to be traced back to Germany’s immigration policy and the guest workers recruitment treaties between 1955 and 1968 (p. 148). It might have been valuable to discuss these single-country findings in a larger comparative perspective in the concluding section, thus offering a broader reflection on the diversity of

institutionalization mechanisms of gender inequality. Hence, a concluding chapter evaluating how specific policy conditions in different case-specific settings can produce disparities between labor market inclusion and within-market equality for women would have nicely complemented this book.

Despite the mentioned limitations, *Gendered Tradeoffs* advances our thinking about the complex relationships among gender, employment, and public policy and succeeds in illustrating the underlying forces behind gender inequality. Hence, this book provides an important reference for any scholars who are interested in economic inequality, comparative work–family and life course research, and in the American and German cases, in particular.